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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN RESPONSE: EU INVITES BURMESE FM TO ASEM-6 SUMMIT

REF: STATE 124139

¶1. (SBU) Acting Economic-Political Counselor delivered reftel demarche on August 1 to Peter Storer, the Deputy Director for Asia and Oceania in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Storer said it was a difficult decision, but that the EU had reached a consensus to invite the Burmese Foreign Minister to the September ASEM-6 Summit in Helsinki. Storer was aware of Washington's objections to the invitation, but emphasized that the ASEM-6 Summit offers the opportunity to pressure Burma to improve its human right record. Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel will attend the meeting.

¶2. (SBU) Storer cited two main reasons why the EU is including the Burmese Foreign Minister. When the Dutch decided in 2005 to exclude Burma from the ASEM Summit, Storer said that the ASEAN nations boycotted the meeting in Rotterdam, as a result. The EU, he said, needed to find a middle ground and the Helsinki invitation would not only foster the EU's relationship with ASEAN, but also provide an opportunity for the EU and ASEAN to jointly exert pressure on Burma. Storer also noted that ASEAN issued a strong statement on Burma last week at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Kuala Lampur, which, he emphasized, was a move for ASEAN in the right direction. Storer said the ASEM-6 Summit would probably generate a similar statement condemning Burma's human rights record and its military regime. China and India are not yet on board, but Storer said the EU plans to engage these countries on Burma during the summit.

Kilner